September 25 Capital Journal: Husted took gifts from JobsOhio.

My focus on this Husted article is not on Senator Husted. It is unrelated to partisan politics. It is on former Governor Kasich's big "business" deal—JobsOhio.

15 years ago, the Ohio General Assembly created, at the behest of Governor Kasich, this private economic development group, JobsOhio, funded by money that flowed from liquor profits to the state; hence it is a state financial resource.

JobsOhio was created to perform some of the functions that the State Department of Economic Development had been doing for decades. The rationale seemed to be that a private group, not encumbered with transparency and accountability, could operate at the "speed of business" and thus be more effective than a transparent, publicly accountable state agency. What state officials should have understood at the time of creation is that they were setting the stage for fraud and corruption.

JobsOhio has come under the scrutiny of the press and the public in recent months. What is being unveiled is not pretty. This revelation regarding this matter is likely the tip of the iceberg.

The General Assembly should make JobsOhio a fully transparent and accountable state agency or transfer the duties to the Department of Economic Development.

Likewise, private schools that take vouchers should be required to follow public school rules.

Husted took gifts from JobsOhio while he was Ohio lieutenant governor, financial disclosures show

Neither Husted nor JobsOhio will say what the gifts were and Ohio law doesn't require them to

By **Marty**-September 25, 2026 4:00 am

Then-Lt. Gov. Jon Husted (right) welcomes President and CEO of JobsOhio J.P. Nauseef to the podium at a groundbreaking ceremony for Intel's new semiconductor manufacturing site on Sept. 9, 2022, in Licking County, Ohio. (Photo by Graham Stokes for the Ohio Capital Journal / Republish photo only with original story)

This story has been updated with additional comment from the Ohio Ethics Commission.

Financial disclosures filed by Ohio Republican U.S. Sen. Jon Husted with the Ohio Ethics Commission show that the quasi-private economic development entity JobsOhio gave gifts to Husted in 2021, 2022, and 2023 when he was lieutenant governor.

The gifts could have been as paltry as a meal at a local restaurant or they could have been trips worth thousands, but Husted's office won't say what gifts JobsOhio gave him or what they were worth, neither will JobsOhio, and Ohio law doesn't require them to.

Husted approaches a close midterm election contest against former Ohio U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Democrat.

While the financial disclosures he filed with the Ohio Ethics Commission show that JobsOhio gave Husted gifts in 2021, 2022 and 2023. In 2024, Husted's disclosure doesn't show any gifts from JobsOhio, but it does show one from its CEO, J.P. Nauseef.

JobsOhio was created by the legislature, its board is appointed by the governor, and it controls the state liquor franchise. As a "private" corporation, it has been exempt from most state open meetings and records laws as it has disbursed more than $2 billion in what used to be public money — profits from the state liquor franchise — to private businesses.

In its 15 years, it's made contributions to many entities, but good government watchdogs have questioned the ones it's made to the businesses of its board members and those of affiliated entities.

Earlier this year, the public learned that JobsOhio paid $60,000 to a woman with whom Ohio State President Ted Carter had an "inappropriate relationship" that led to his ouster.

The money was supposed to fund production of four episodes of a podcast, but only one was made. JobsOhio in March said it would look into trying to claw the money back, but now it won't respond when asked if it's attempted to do that.

Catherine Turcer, executive director of Common Cause Ohio, said of the gifts to Husted that the public should have enough information to determine whether it could influence decision making.

"It makes sense for JobsOhio to be as transparent as possible because otherwise voters are going to really question their motives and assume the worst," she said. "It's not necessarily fair that the public would assume the worst, but that's one of the reasons why transparency is essential… It's always better to have good information than have things be super-foggy."

State law allows for quite a bit of fogginess.

Ohio law "only requires that the filer disclose 'the source of each gift of over seventy-five dollars,'" Paul Nick, executive director of the Ohio Ethics Commission, said in an email. "It does not require the filer to disclose the nature or value of the item."

Nick added, however, that officials can't take a gift "that is of such character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties."

He added, "We've said that, in simpler terms, means you cannot accept (and no private party or entity can give) a substantial thing of value if the source of the thing of value is someone who is doing or seeking to business with, regulated by, or interested in matters before the official's public agency."

In one of the years Husted received gifts from JobsOhio, Gov. Mike DeWine appointed lobbyist Josh Rubin to chair the JobsOhio Board, in September 2023. Rubin was being paid by Intel at the time and continued to be at least until this year.

Rubin was registered until the end of last year to lobby JobsOhio on behalf of Intel and other businesses, the Capital Journal reported in August.

JobsOhio has committed $150 million to the long delayed Intel chip-making project near Albany. The DeWine administration, of which Husted was a member at the time, committed more than $2 billion in taxpayer dollars.

Rubin's lobbying disclosures show that he actively lobbied Husted and the lieutenant governor's office for Intel until DeWine appointed Husted to fill the U.S. Senate seat at the start of 2025 that was vacated by now-Vice President JD Vance.

Though the substance and value of the gifts remain unknown, Husted received gifts from JobOhio and its CEO while he was still lieutenant governor and the chairman of JobsOhio's board was being paid to lobby him on behalf of a company that had already gotten more than $600 million from the state and stood to get much more.

Was the gift "a substantial thing of value" and was its source "someone who (was) doing or seeking to business with, regulated by, or interested in matters before the official's public agency," we asked.

"I can't draw any direct conclusions in response to your questions without investigating all of the facts," Paul Nick of the Ethics Commission said.

He referred to a written explanation of how the law relates to gifts to public officials from nonprofits (JobsOhio is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization).

The law "prohibits a person or nonprofit organization from promising, offering, or giving 'things of value' to a public official or employee if the things of value could have a 'substantial' and 'improper' influence on the public official or employee," it says.

"'Substantial' gifts could include jewelry, the promise of future employment, meals at expensive restaurants, entertainment activities, such as exclusive golf outings or season tickets for a professional sports team, or travel, meal and lodging expenses," it says.

The document defines as an "improper source" entities seeking to do business with a public agency, that are regulated by a public agency, or that have matters before the public agency.

In a follow-up question the Ethics Commission was asked if had any way of knowing what JobsOhio had given Husted short of mounting an investigation — and whether such a probe would be undertaken.

"The commission has the authority to request further information from anyone who files a disclosure statement with our office," Nick said in an email. "That process is under (Ohio Revised Code) 102.06 and like all of our investigations, it's confidential and can be initiated by the commission."

Turcer of Common Cause said that in the context of recent controversies, state laws regarding gifts and political contributions need to be updated — and Husted and JobsOhio need to be more transparent.

In those recent controversies, Husted controversially joined the board of a private bank in 2022, saying he was doing it for the experience, not the money. The bank contributed nearly $500,000 to his political committee. Husted and the DeWine administration also were part of an energy bailout that blew up into one of the biggest corruption scandals in state history.

"We're living in a time period when what's legal and what's ethical are clearly being bent and broken," Turcer said.